

Department of
NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

Nutrition Support for Dementia Care



Managing Nutrition in Person Living with Dementia

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Dementia can cause changes in appetite, taste, smell, thirst and the ability to chew and swallow. As the condition progresses, individuals with dementia may also experience behavioural changes that can affect their eating habits.

These changes can affect their nutrition and overall health.

Learning how to manage these changes can help improve the nutrition and well-being of your loved ones.

Behavioural Changes that can Impact Nutrition

- Unable to sit long enough to finish a meal
- Food is hoarded in mouth but not swallowed
- Food is not chewed sufficiently
- Reduced appetite

Middle Stage

Early Stage

- Difficulty shopping, cooking and storing food
- Eating spoiled foods
- Mistake non-food items (e.g. wax or plastic fruit) for edible items

Advanced Stage

- Unable to self-feed
- Refusal to open mouth and turn away when food is offered
- Loss of ability to ask for foods / fluids
- Swallowing difficulties

Nutrition Challenges in Dementia

Changes in Food Preferences

Your loved ones may have altered food preferences, difficulty in recognising certain foods, flavours, smells and textures.

They may start to dislike food that they previously enjoyed.



Co-ordination Problems

As dementia progresses, using cutlery to eat or drink can become increasingly difficult.



Changes in Mood

Your loved ones may become withdrawn, agitated, distracted or upset. This may then affect their behaviour during mealtimes and reduce their food intake.



Changes in Memory

Your loved ones may forget to eat, or think they have already eaten. This can lead to missing of meals or excessive consumption of food, which can result in weight loss or weight gain.



Dementia may also affect how your loved ones recognise hunger, thirst, smells or fullness.

Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration

Difficulty in getting foods into mouth?

- ✓ Show them how to eat by holding a spoon and getting them to imitate
- ✓ Use "hand over hand" approach
- ✓ Encourage more finger foods

Problems with Co-ordination



Difficulty in handling cutlery or cups?

- ✓ Cut up their foods and allow them to use their hands to eat
- ✓ Consult an Occupational Therapist for adaptive cutlery

Unable to recognise foods?

- ✓ Explain what the food is by using pictures

Changes in Memory

- ✓ Keep a routine – schedule daily meal and snack times.
- ✓ Keep snacks and fluids within easy reach

Forget to eat or drink?



Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration



Distracted from eating?

- ✓ Use hand or verbal cues to remind them to eat
- ✓ Remove distractions such as TV. Try playing relaxing music

Too drowsy or difficult to wake up during meal times?

- ✓ Offer a gentle touch to wake them up
- ✓ Optimise eating at other times of the day when they are more awake

Behavioural Changes

Hides, throws, or plays with food?

- ✓ Table should be neat and tidy
- ✓ Put a smaller portion of the food onto their plate

Food is held in the mouth?

- ✓ Use verbal cues to encourage them to chew
- ✓ Massage their cheeks gently

Refuse food or avoids eating?

- ✓ Encourage eating at another time
- ✓ Offer favourite and familiar foods first
- ✓ Offer finger foods



Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration

Poor Intake of Food and/or Drinks

Due to medical conditions, depression, pain, tiredness or medications



- ✓ Encourage consumption of high energy, high protein snacks and nourishing drinks
- ✓ Fortify food and drinks[^]
- ✓ Encourage finger foods

- ✓ Consider oral nutritional supplements
- ✓ To ensure adequate hydration, use a cup or bottle with measurement for ease of monitoring

Examples of Finger Foods

- Biscuits
- Cake
- Cream puff
- Fish cake
- Goreng pisang
- Jelly
- Kueh
- Nuts
- Spring roll
- Siew Mai

[^] For more tips and ideas on food fortification, high calorie snacks and nourishing fluids, you may refer to another brochure by scanning this QR code:

Small Appetite &
Unintentional Weight Loss



Other Information

Monitoring Indicators

Person living with dementia are at increased risk of poor nutrition. Use the following self-screening tool (two questions) to identify if your loved one is at risk.

Are you or your loved one:

- ☐ Experiencing unplanned weight loss (3 kg or more in past 3 to 6 months)?
- ☐ Eating lesser than before (especially if they are less than ½ of their usual amount for the past 5 days or more)?

If you have answered "YES" to either or both of the above questions, or face further challenges with nutrition and hydration, it is recommended that you consult with a Dietitian or Doctor for a more detailed assessment.



Other Useful Resources

If you require more information and support on dementia, you can call Dementia Singapore Helpline at 6377 0700 (<https://dementia.org.sg>).

Clinics B2
Nutrition and Dietetics
TTSH Medical Centre, Level B2

Contact:
6256 6011 (General Enquiries)



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